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TAGS: [EFIS](#) [EPET](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RCA](#) [RS](#) [SENV](#) [NO](#)  
SUBJECT: LAVROV AND STOERE TALK BUSINESS, IGNORE TOUGH  
ISSUES

Classified By: Acting Deputy chief of Mission, Kristen F. Bauer,  
for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) In two days of meetings, Norwegian FM Jonas Gahr Stoere and Russian FM Sergei Lavrov discussed an increased Russian presence on Svalbard, fishing enforcement, eased visa rules for the border area, and environmental questions. Meeting on June 9-10, first in Kirkenes on the Norwegian side of the border and then in Murmansk, the two foreign ministers stressed the good relations enjoyed by both nations, focused on economic cooperation and avoided conflict over the most difficult issues, agreeing to disagree on the Svalbard fisheries zone, ignoring increases in Russian military activities, and limiting discussion of environment, oil and gas cooperation and the maritime border to generalities. According to Norwegian MFA officials, FM Stoere began the meetings by saying that they should focus on regional Barents issues, and the discussion that followed did just that.

-----Economic Focus-----

¶2. (SBU) FM Stoere and FM Lavrov both stressed the good relations between their countries and the potential for increased economic cooperation. Shtokman was a subject of much general discussion, but no specifics resulted. Lavrov characterized Norwegian-Russian cooperation on Shtokman as "strengthening of world, primarily European, energy security." The foreign ministers opened a joint StatoilHydro/Russian oil protection laboratory, designed to improve the joint ability to respond to oil spills. Fishing was another topic of discussion with Stoere praising Russia for improvements in fighting illegal over fishing. Lavrov criticized Norwegian detentions of Russian trawlers, particularly around Svalbard.

----- Svalbard -----

¶3. (C) The MFA stated that Lavrov raises the issue of increased Russian presence on Svalbard, every time he and Stoere meet, and he did so again at these meetings. He did not mention any specifics, such as the Russian proposal for an airfield at Barentsburg, something the Norwegians oppose. Stoere welcomed the presence of Russians but also was clear to stress the Norwegian position that international law gives Norway full sovereignty in Svalbard's waters, including its "fisheries zone" which is not recognized by other signatories to the 1920 Svalbard treaty.

----- Border Issues -----

¶4. (C) The main development of the talks was the agreement by FM Lavrov to consider a visa free travel arrangement for residents of the area living within 30 kilometers of the border. MFA officials said that Lavrov was unusually forthcoming and pragmatic on this issue and even stated that

the Russian 15 kilometer border regime will be adjusted on the Norwegian border area to relax some of the new restrictions imposed by the FSB. Six of the border cities near Norway will be exempted from the border regime, thus easing the bureaucratic hurdles for increased economic activity. The FMs formally exchanged ratification documents for the agreement reached last year on the Varangerfjord segment of the disputed maritime border. Stoere remained publicly optimistic that an agreement on the rest could be reached before the planned start of production of Shtockman in 2013. Privately, MFA officials simply stated that there is no timetable for resolution of the border and no follow up meeting is scheduled.

-----Environment-----

¶5. (C) Norway has had a long interest in environmental cleanup of the Kola peninsula and the GON has donated millions of Norwegian kroner to this effort, to dismantle Russian submarines, remove radioactive lighthouse batteries, increase safety in nuclear reactors in the area, and help Norilsk Nikel clean up its factories. In the days leading up to the FMs' meeting the Norwegian environmental community was very critical of GON efforts in getting results. Media reports claimed that the donated money to Norilsk Nikel was not used for environment, but went right into the pockets of the oligarchs controlling the company. Stoere raised this issue with Lavrov who publicly stated that "Russia, together with Norway, stands for the highest ecological standards." Privately he told the Norwegians that the specific issue with Norilsk Nikel is a company responsibility.

-----International Issues-----

¶6. (C) International issues did not feature prominently in the two foreign ministers' discussions but were discussed during a dinner in Murmansk. Issues covered included the Caucasus, NATO enlargement and Ukraine. The MFA promised a more detailed report once they receive the summary from the Norwegian Ambassador in Moscow.

-----Media Reaction-----

¶7. (SBU) Media reaction to the meetings has been very quiet. In a commentary before the meeting, one leading essayist stated that although it is an honor for Lavrov to devote two days of his busy schedule to meet with Stoere it is not clear what the GON has achieved with its focus on the Barents region. The essayist claimed that Lavrov is willing to meet Stoere in order to use this moment, when Norway has less tight contact with the U.S. than previously and remains outside the EU, to press for Russian interests in Svalbard and on the maritime border. Other critical coverage included the issue of the GON's ineffective environmental policies in the Kola region and some criticism in Northern Norwegian newspapers over the lack of results from the GON's focus on the High North, pointing out that North Norway has seen little result from much rhetorical focus on the region. One specific complaint mentioned was that 80 percent of Norwegian research on Barents issues takes place in southern Norway.

WHITNEY